

EL SALVADOR:

Killings of Priests a Setback for Government

The killings yesterday in San Salvador of several Jesuit priests, machinegunned at their residence by unknown assailants, may increase pressure on the government to accept a rebel-proposed cease-fire.

The insurgents have been quick to blame the government for the murders of the respected Jesuit rector of the Central American University in San Salvador, Ignacio Ellacuria, and five colleagues—as well as two other people. They are using the deaths as a rallying cry for a popular uprising and for an end to US aid to San Salvador. The internationally known Ellacuria was a longtime supporter of the insurgents but recently had criticized rebel violence and had praised the moderate course of the Cristiani government.

Responsibility for the killings remains unclear despite reports they were carried out by uniformed men. [REDACTED] said this week that [REDACTED] insurgents were disguising themselves in police uniforms and planning to attack unspecified targets near the university.

[REDACTED] the insurgents are using the university as a resupply center during the current offensive; police on Sunday found a cache of weapons at the Jesuit dormitory. [REDACTED]

Meanwhile, the FMLN has requested a brief cease-fire to evacuate civilian casualties. Nicaragua is pressing the OAS to call for a more lengthy, nationwide cessation of hostilities in El Salvador that would be verified by members of the UN border verification force. [REDACTED]

Comment: Senior Salvadoran civilian or military leaders are sensitive to international opinion and are unlikely to have ordered the murders, although individuals in the security services or members of the extreme right may have acted independently. The insurgents, too, could have done the killings. They stand to gain the most by casting the government as brutally repressive while diverting attention from their waning military fortunes. [REDACTED]

San Salvador probably wants to delay responding to the guerrilla cease-fire proposal to give the Army time to root out remaining FMLN resistance in the capital. The UN Security Council mandate is for a border-monitoring force, not a peacekeeping group. [REDACTED]

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